serious offences. It also seeks to abolish mandatory death sentence in respect of certain offences. It also seeks to mention certain situations whose presence should make any offence more serious for imposing higher punishment than the minimum punishment.

Automation of Banks in Maharashtra

4662. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that lack of automation is costing Nationalised Banks substantial loss of income in Maharashtra;

(b) if so, the details of estimated loss of business, bank-wise;

(c) the details of fresh initiatives taken/proposed to be taken to provide technology solution to the Nationalised Banks connecting chain of their branches for cost effective and efficient operations; and

(d) the details of phased programme worked out bank-wise for the next five years in Maharashtra?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI BALASAHEB VIKHE PATIL): (a) to (d) Information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Central Excise on Plastic Products

4663. SHRI C.M. IBRAHIM: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that while household goods made of stainless steel and aluminium and cutlery and glass-tableware are exempt from Central Excise, the corresponding household plastic products are subject to Central Excise;

(b) if so, whether Government are aware that it is the comparatively weaker sections of the society who largely have to restore to plastic ware; and

(c) whether Government have received representations in this regard from plastic industry; if so, the details thereof and the Government's decision thereon?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI V. DHANANJAYA KUMAR): (a) There is no excise duty

on household goods made of stainless steel, aluminium, cutlery and glass-tableware. Subject to certain conditions, plastic products are exempt from excise duty upto Rs. 50 lakhs in a financial year, if produced by SSI Units.

(b) Plastic wares are consumed by a wider cross-section of the society and this is not confined to a particular section.

(c) Representations have been received from the certain associations seeking, *inter alia,* to restore the pre-budget exemption scheme to articles of plastic.

The rate of excise duty on plastic materials was reduced from 24% to 16% in the Budget for 2000-2001. The rate of excise duty on articles of plastics was also reduced from 24% to 16%. At present there is no proposal to modify the structure of duty on household articles of plastics.

Amendment to the Banking Secrecy Act

4664. SHRIMATI JAYAPRADA NAHATA:
SHRI AMAR SINGH:

Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is any proposal under Government's consideration to amend the Banking Secrecy Act; and

(b) if so, the details thereof and by when it is likely to be amended?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI BALASAHEB VIKHE PATIL): (a) There is no proposal to amend the provisions in various banking laws, relating to confidentiality in respect of bank accounts.

(b) Does not arise.

Loans disbursed in Meghalaya

4665. SHRI ONWARD L. NONGTDU: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state the details of the loans disbursed by all the banks for agriculture purposes to the farmers, small-scale industries and artisans in Meghalaya during each of the last three years and till-date, bank-wise and year-wise?